



Classic BEAUTY

Dreaming of a white Christmas? Here's how to make it happen in your garden



TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS MARIANNE ALEXANDER

The charm of a white garden is nothing new. Long before author and gardener Vita Sackville-West planted up her legendary white garden at Sissinghurst, England, white gardens were created in medieval Japan and India. Known as moon gardens, they were designed to reflect moonlight.

But what is it about a white garden that makes it so popular? For starters it's the simplicity of the scheme and the feeling of coolness and serenity – very welcome in the heat of summer. On a more practical note, the inclusion of white lightens up shady areas and dark corners of the garden with the result that even small, dull gardens appear lighter and larger.

Don't overlook the value of a white garden at night when it takes on a glamorous, romantic feel. Finally there is the advantage of scent as many white flowers use perfume as a means of attracting the moths that pollinate them.

An all-white scheme works well in informal and formal designs; in the latter, loose airy plantings can be confined within clipped hedges, while white perennial borders can work well in both.

Sandy Ovenstone is famous for her white garden (featured here) at Stellenberg in Cape Town. Over the years Sandy has perfected and refined her choice of plants. When she found pure white too stark, particularly under our hot African skies, she started experimenting with different plants and combinations.

One year she introduced varieties with plum foliage and dark red leaves like bronze fennel which came to the fore in late summer and creamy yellow flowers

which she finds soften the starkness of white and add depth to the garden. It's a matter of trial and error and finding what works best in your garden and your climate.

WHERE TO START

In small properties, you can plant up your whole garden in white. In larger gardens it is best to set aside a semi-enclosed area or garden room such as off a patio, bedroom or dining room. Even if you live in a tiny townhouse or just have a balcony garden, you can create your own miniature white garden in a pot. (See page 94 for ideas.)

FLOWERS

- Decide whether your garden will be planted up with a white colour scheme all year or just during specific seasons. Although some gardeners feel white is too cool a colour for winter, others feel white sparkles in the cold air.
- Don't choose too many different plants as this can lead to a visual overload; rather plant a few varieties that will dominate during each season. Repeat your planting scheme over and over rather than planting a mishmash of every flower you can find.
- Select flowering plants judiciously. Include some which are bold and large flowered and take centre stage drawing the eye in the same way that a bench or birdbath does. Then introduce some softer, more ethereal plants, or those with lacy flower heads as fillers, as well as some spires and spikes.
- Don't forget to plant a few fragrant varieties to perfume your garden at night. ▷

THIS SPREAD, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ● The focal point of this long white border at Stellenberg is a bench painted a subtle shade of green. Perennials are the main attraction with the bold flowers of lilies drawing the eye and the spikes of foxglove and verbasicum adding a vertical accent. ● White cleome. ● Agapanthus. ● Pale *Penstemon digitalis*. ● *Achillea ptarmica* 'The Pearl'. ● Japanese anemones are autumn flowerers.